United Nations A/C.5/62/SR.1

General Assembly
Sixty-second session

Official Records

Distr.: General
16 October 2007

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 1st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 5 October 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Ali. . . . . (Malaysia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Saha

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07-52983 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General

1. **Ms. Migiro** (Deputy Secretary-General) reaffirmed the importance she attached to the work of the Fifth Committee. Her presence at the opening meeting of the sixty-second session should be interpreted as evidence of the Secretary-General's commitment to engage in a transparent dialogue with Member States in order to create an efficient, directed, pragmatic and accountable administration, focused on results and committed to serving the global good.

2. In order to create a stronger United Nations for a better world, the three pillars of the Organization's work, namely, development, peace and security and human rights, must be reinforced. At the 2005 World Summit and in subsequent General Assembly resolutions, Member States had reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing the authority of the United Nations and had called for strengthened accountability and a more effective and efficient use of human and financial resources. Those issues, as well as questions relating to legislative mandates, budgets, oversight and management reform, would once again be central to the Committee's forthcoming deliberations.

3. The Secretary-General was fully committed to working both within the Secretariat and with Member States to achieve those aims. In the area of peacekeeping, he had dedicated considerable efforts to strengthening the Organization's capacity to manage and sustain complex operations and was encouraged by the willingness of Member States to support his endeavours. He also looked forward to their support in the field of conflict prevention. Building capacity in that area would help to ensure the sustainability of peace agreements and limit the deployment of costly and complex peacekeeping operations.

4. Under the Charter of the United Nations, the Organization's staff must display the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Accordingly, through the establishment of the Ethics Office, the Secretariat had demonstrated its commitment to the implementation of new policies and training initiatives with a view to creating an ethical and transparent working environment. As part of his efforts to strengthen the accountability framework, the Secretary-General attached the utmost importance to the conclusion of performance compacts with his senior managers. Those compacts, which had been drafted on the basis of dialogue between the Deputy Secretary-General and senior managers, were a first for the Secretariat and represented its commitment to enhanced performance, accountability and transparency. They had also served to raise senior managers' awareness of the importance of sharing experiences, working as a team and identifying areas for improvement.

5. The Secretary-General was also fully committed to strengthening the internal management bodies, such as the Management Performance Board and the Management Committee. Those bodies provided a means of solidifying managerial commitment to the reform process and ensuring adequate institutional follow-up to the recommendations of the oversight entities. They would also serve to keep the reform process on track in a coherent and coordinated manner, a task that would prove even more critical in the months ahead as the Secretariat sought to deliver and manage a number of additional proposed improvements, including a new system of internal justice, the enterprise resource planning system and the adoption of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards. Taken together, those reform measures would facilitate the transition to more modern business processes and practices and improve, inter alia, the quality and credibility of financial and management reporting.

6. At the current session, the Secretary-General would be asking Member States for their support in a number of high priority areas. First, he would be submitting for consideration and approval the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009, including a number of add-ons which were essential components of the reform agenda. Second, the Fifth Committee would have before it a series of reports outlining efforts to improve internal controls and accountability, including an update on the various in-house efforts to strengthen procurement and risk management mechanisms, which were particularly important in view of the surge in peacekeeping operations. Third, the Secretary-General intended to submit a comprehensive report on procurement reform, in which he would account for the resources provided at the sixty-first session and update the General Assembly on progress made in the area of internal controls. Fourth, Member States would be asked to move ahead with human resources management

reforms and would receive details of and resource requirements for the new system of internal justice. Lastly, the information requested on system needs, scope and resource requirements for the global resource management system would be provided. Progress on all those fronts would be critical to transforming the Organization's human resources base and enhancing managerial decision-making tools, including better financial controls and more accurate and timely management reporting.

7. While the Secretariat would not shrink from its responsibility to seek to ensure the continuous improvement of the delivery of the mandates entrusted to it, Member States must support its endeavours by providing adequate resources. She was convinced that, by working together in partnership, Member States and the Secretariat would be able to confront the challenges of the twenty-first century successfully.

Organization of work (A/C.5/62/1; A/C.5/62/L.1)

8. **The Chairman** invited members to consider the proposed programme of work of the Committee for the main part of the session, as contained in the informal paper circulated to delegations. The proposed programme of work had been prepared on the basis of the list of agenda items allocated to the Committee by the General Assembly (A/C.5/62/1). The status of preparedness of the relevant documentation for those items was described in document A/C.5/62/L.1. A separate list on the status of documentation would be issued for the first and second resumed sessions of the Committee.

9. He wished to highlight some of the recommendations made by the General Committee in document A/62/250, which had been adopted by the Assembly at its 3rd plenary meeting: The Fifth Committee should complete its work for the main part of the session by 14 December 2007. In view of financial constraints, meetings of the Main Committees, including informal meetings, should start promptly at 10 a.m. and be adjourned by 6 p.m. The General Assembly had also decided, in accordance with past practice, to waive the requirement that at least one quarter of the members of a Main Committee should be present in order to declare a meeting open and to permit the debate to proceed.

10. Efforts should be made to reduce the number and the length of resolutions adopted, and resolutions should not contain requests for reports from the Secretary-General unless such reports were strictly necessary for the implementation of those resolutions or for the continued consideration of an item. Resolutions should also be more action-oriented. In addition, the Main Committees should merely take note of the reports of the Secretary-General or of subsidiary organs which did not require a decision by the Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them unless specifically requested to do so.

11. With regard to the programme budget, he drew attention to rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly on statements of programme budget implications and to paragraphs 12 and 13 of General Assembly decision 34/401 on the need to allow sufficient time for the Secretariat to prepare estimates of expenditure arising from draft resolutions and for the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee to consider such estimates. As noted in paragraph 36 of the report of the General Committee, in most cases more than 48 hours were required for the Secretary-General to review the programme budget implications of proposals before the Assembly. Accordingly, he urged delegations to convey to their colleagues in the other Main Committees the importance of ensuring timely consideration of and action on draft proposals with programme budget implications.

12. **Mr. Ramos** (Portugal), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that it should be possible for the Committee to complete its work by the scheduled deadline (14 December 2007) without meeting outside regular working hours. The European Union was committed to building on the progress already achieved and favoured making maximum use of the time available by, inter alia, starting meetings on time. On the issue of documentation, he noted with concern that reports continued to be issued very late, sometimes even after the date scheduled for the completion of the Committee's work for the main part of the session. The European Union would not be in a position to discuss any reports scheduled for submission on or after 14 December 2007.

13. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 and the financing of the international tribunals and peacekeeping missions were issues of particular importance. Management reform also remained a priority for the European Union, since both the Organization as a whole and its Member States would benefit from improved administration. Accordingly, he looked forward to receiving the reports on the various aspects of that reform, including the administration of justice, human resources management, information and communication technology, and oversight, some of which were long overdue.

14. **Mr. Hussain** (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, expressed his appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General for her statement. However, referring to the issue of human resources management reform, he stressed that in addition to calling for the highest standards of integrity and competence, the Charter of the United Nations also provided for the principle of equitable geographical distribution of staff.

15. In accordance with General Assembly resolutions 59/265, 58/250 and 57/283 B, all documents should be issued in all six official languages six weeks before the opening of the session. It was regrettable that failure to comply with those resolutions was now the rule rather than the exception. A significant proportion of important documents were now routinely issued late, and such delays had a serious impact on the quality of the Committee's deliberations. The Group of 77 and China would like to see the early results of the measures envisaged by the Secretary-General to address the underlying causes of the problem. The Group's readiness to consider any item on the programme of work was contingent on the availability of all relevant documents in all six official languages sufficiently in advance to allow it to coordinate its position.

16. At the sixty-first session, under intense political pressure, the Fifth Committee had been forced to deal with some important issues at the last minute, including the proposed restructuring of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It was therefore regrettable that, despite the purportedly urgent need to appoint an Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, five months after its establishment the post was still vacant.

17. At the current session, the Committee would consider several reform-related items. In view of the strategic value of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009, he stressed the need to allocate sufficient time for extensive deliberations. A spirit of transparency and inclusiveness should also prevail during negotiations on all items. The Group of 77 and China had a number of questions about the efficiency and effectiveness gained as a result of decisions relating to the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 and wished to reiterate its opposition to decision-making in small groups, especially on issues relating to the budget and reform, and to imposing any conditions on the budget negotiations.

18. **Mr. Fermín** (Dominican Republic), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, drew attention to a number of issues that were of particular interest to his delegation. First, referring to the proposed programme budget, he said that the Secretary-General's proposals, as well as the comments of ACABQ, should enable the General Assembly to provide the Organization with the resources it needed to comply fully with its mandate. He reaffirmed his commitment to strict budgetary control and stressed that resources should be distributed evenly among the Organization's priority activities. It was unfortunate that the Secretary-General's proposals in the area of development did not reflect that imperative.

19. Second, the States members of the Rio Group attached particular importance to the scale of assessments. In that connection, they endorsed the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning the requests for exemption under Article 19 of the Charter submitted by the Central African Republic, the Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia and Tajikistan.

20. Third, he underlined the need for mechanisms to ensure the professionalization and effectiveness of the new system for the administration of justice, as well as for guarantees of due process and transparency in line with relevant international standards.

21. Fourth, referring to the capital master plan, he expressed serious concern about rumours of a possible cost escalation, particularly since many States members of the Rio Group had already paid their contributions for the project in full. The General Assembly had the ultimate authority to decide on the

strategy and cost of the capital master plan, on the basis of the relevant reports and presentations submitted by the Secretary-General.

22. Fifth, he reaffirmed the importance of the United Nations common system and the essential role of the International Civil Service Commission in regulating and coordinating the conditions of service of the participating organizations.

23. Sixth, with regard to pension arrangements for United Nations staff, the Rio Group was committed to finding a way to mitigate the adverse consequences of dollarization in Ecuador, and hoped that the Pension Fund would respond to the General Assembly's request by submitting a proposal on that issue.

24. Seventh, the Group would continue to participate in the negotiations on human resources management reform, with a view to enhancing the Organization's effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

25. The Group had taken note of the restructuring of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Secretary-General's proposals on the reform of the Department of Political Affairs. However, it was of some concern to the Group that matters relating to the reform of the development agenda, agreed upon at the 2005 World Summit, had not benefited from similar priority attention. In view of the Fifth Committee's full agenda, he was also concerned that, to date, no formal proposal on the latter issue appeared to have been submitted.

26. Lastly, he would be grateful for an explanation of the reasons behind the delay in appointing an Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, and expressed the hope that the post would eventually be filled by a national of a developing or troop-contributing country.

27. **Mr. Ng'ongolo** (United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that, while the Group appreciated the Secretariat's efforts to present a balanced programme of work, it was concerned about the late issuance of reports in violation of several General Assembly resolutions, that situation aggravated the constraints on smaller delegations, in particular, given the volume of work to be done, the limited time, and the fact that several items were of equally high priority.

28. **Mr. Wallace** (United States of America) said that the Committee was embarking on the difficult task of determining the appropriate level of resources for United Nations programmes to benefit people around the world, while also ensuring that it was fiscally responsible in its decision-making and that the resources provided by Member States were used effectively and efficiently. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 totalled well over $4 billion. It was therefore imperative that the Organization's resources should be used wisely. One sign of good management would be to aim for zero growth in the budget at all times, and especially at a time when resources were limited.

29. The mandate review that world leaders had called for at the September 2005 summit would strengthen the programme of work and improve the efficient allocation of resources. Further consultations on the matter among Member States were pointless, however, without a viable framework for such a review that would lead to the elimination of redundant or irrelevant mandates.

30. His delegation urged the Secretary-General to ensure the implementation of reforms by finalizing a system-wide code of ethics and applying the authority and policies of the Ethics Office throughout the Organization, including the funds and programmes. All United Nations officials should emulate the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General in making public their financial disclosure statements so that all organizations had the same high standards of ethics, transparency and accountability.

31. In the area of oversight, the new Independent Audit Advisory Committee would soon be advising the General Assembly on how to strengthen the scope and effectiveness of existing internal oversight mechanisms. The Office of Internal Oversight Services must be guaranteed operational independence so that it might perform its duties free of real or perceived influence from the bodies it was intended to oversee. It must also have sufficient resources to perform its core functions. It was, moreover, essential that the United Nations should adopt a formal internal control framework to improve transparency and accountability, and define an accountability framework and achieve results-based management.

32. The procurement system had been improved through staff training and the call for an independent bid protest system. Nevertheless, further changes were needed to improve the management and organization

structure of procurement and to clarify the relationship between Headquarters and peacekeeping procurement.

33. The system of administering justice for United Nations staff members needed further improvement, and contracts and conditions of service should be regularized to improve recruitment and the retention of well-qualified personnel. Finally, the United Nations should make a realistic assessment of key outputs and activities so that its limited resources could be directed towards high-priority programmes that would produce results.

34. **Mr. Romero-Martinez** (Honduras) welcomed the Secretariat's decision to propose measures for increased efficiency in the use of resources to carry out the mandates and priorities of the United Nations. However, it was of the utmost concern to his delegation that the Development Account represented only 0.37 per cent of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009.

35. The system of internal justice should be overhauled completely in accordance with General Assembly resolution A/61/261. Fair and balanced administration of justice within the Secretariat would set an example of high ethical standards, integrity and transparency for all international organizations. His delegation also hoped to see specific measures that would reduce the time posts remained vacant in the Organization, as well as mechanisms to ensure more equitable geographical distribution, including within senior management posts.

36. Speaking as President of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), he informed the Committee that, at the end of 2007, the Institute would be in a position to reimburse the amount of $557,800 that had been provided by the United Nations, and that it would not have to request funds from the regular budget of the United Nations to finance its programmes in 2008.

37. **Mr. Muhith** (Bangladesh) said that, although 2007 was an important budget year for the Fifth Committee, he hoped that other priority items would also receive attention. The ongoing problem of the late issuance of documents was unacceptable in that it delayed the start of work and prolonged the decision-making process.

38. **Mr. Poulin** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that in a climate of increasing budgets, it was more important than ever to allocate resources efficiently and to practise financial responsibility. Management reform should play a key role in achieving those aims.

39. **The Chairman** said he took it that the Committee approved the proposed programme of work on the understanding that the Bureau would take into account the views expressed and make the necessary adjustments.

40. *It was so decided.*

41. **The Chairman** proposed that a deadline of 16 October should be set for the submission of candidatures for appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments, and that the elections should be held on 2 November. With respect to the appointment of members of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal, he reminded the Committee that, in paragraph 36 of General Assembly resolution 61/261 on the administration of justice at the United Nations, the Assembly had decided to continue consideration of the item during the sixty-second session as a matter of priority with the objective of implementing the new system of administration of justice no later than January 2009, while paragraphs 29 to 31 of the resolution set forth the relevant transitional measures.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.